

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

A FIELD GUIDE TO WESTERN BIRDS. By Roger Tory Peterson. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. 1941: 4½ x 7¼ in., xviii + 240 pp., 6 col. pls., 40 black and white pls., 40 text figs., map. \$2.75.

The Editor of this journal may have erred in requesting the undersigned to review the present work, for the latter professes partiality for Mr. Peterson's unique style of field bird guide. The novelties introduced in this author's "A Field Guide to the Birds" (1934) and elaborated upon in the revised edition of 1939, appear to have reached culmination in the present work. At least, it seems to this reviewer that there is little room left for improvement. We doubt whether any other person in this country combines Mr. Peterson's qualities for conciseness of expression, both in illustration and in print, of the essential identification points of birds, features which are expressed in every page of this book.

With these words of well merited praise, we turn to a brief description of the book. Although it contains 260 pages of material plus 46 unnumbered pages of plates, the book is not beyond "pocket" size; but it would seem a pity to so abuse such a valuable little volume. The 201 pages of main text are interspersed with the 40 excellent pen and ink figures, many of which depict details of identification points; while each plate usually portrays from five or six to twenty or more species in Mr. Peterson's characteristic, diagrammatic style. The book's scope is conveniently indicated by a map and includes the eleven western states, western Texas including the Rio Grande valley, and the western part of the Great Plains area. Here it is noted that observers in the eastern margin of the area will also require the eastern companion volume to cover adequately their regions.

The plan of the book closely follows that of its revised eastern predecessor, except as regards the treatment of subspecies. Thus, a brief preface and directions as to how to use the book comprise the 18 introductory pages. Here the novel treatment accorded subspecies is but briefly mentioned, while this important matter is more fully explained in the form of an addendum, where a list of the subspecies and their ranges is also provided. It would seem more logical to have included the remarks about subspecies in the preface and the reviewer urges readers to peruse this section before using the book. That this was not done was probably due to the author's commendable desire to de-emphasize the subspecies in field identification work. Mr. Peterson has handled this difficult subject in an admirable and courageous way. His efforts in this direction should do much to lighten criticism of similar changes contemplated for the next edition of the A.O.U. Check-list.

Briefly, in most cases only the species or the single subspecies, if but one form occurs within the scope of the book, is named and figured. Where several races of a species occur, the common and scientific names of all known from the region are listed at the end of the species' accounts. The range is here provided for the entire species only and is restricted to the scope of the book. Subspecies' ranges are, as stated, listed in the addendum. It would seem to have saved some space to have given the subspecific ranges in the main text, but such procedure might have added importance to subspecies which the author desired to avoid. There are a few exceptions to this rule, cases in which it is possible to identify subspecies in the field, like the races of the Canada Goose and White-crowned Sparrow, in which instances the field identification marks and the ranges of the subspecific forms are provided in the main text, following the species accounts.

There are included 534 forms which are treated as species. This includes practically all of the wild birds of the area, even "casuals" and seven introduced species. Under these main forms, not more than about ten subspecies in all are described as being identifiable in the field. In all other cases the subspecies are referred to as having "no apparent field differences," their field identification being

thought to be either very difficult or impossible. This is certainly a step in the right direction with which most ornithologists will heartily agree.

Each main form is named, usually with the A. O. U. Check-list's vernacular and scientific names. If there are subspecies in the area, the note "Subsp." follows. Then comes a reference to illustrations and in many instances, especially of ducks, hawks, shorebirds, and gulls, there are two or three figures of a species. Next the length of the bird is given in inches at the beginning of the word description which covers both sexes if different and sometimes immature plumages as well, always concisely stressing field characteristics. In many instances there follows a section on voice, but this is so frequently omitted that one wonders how little may be published elsewhere in this connection. In the cases of the similar appearing species of the *Empidonax* flycatchers and of subspecies of the White-crowned Sparrow, where the birds' songs may differ more than their plumages, helpful diagrammatic song analyses are provided in the text. Finally, the form's range within the scope of the work is provided, and following this, the subspecies if any, are listed.

The success of Mr. Peterson's books, we think, lies principally in his excellent diagrammatic drawings and in their number. In this respect the present volume is especially rich. Of the 534 species treated, 464 (87 per cent) are figured. A number of them are illustrated four or more times to show the sexes, ages, and various postures. Thus this is truly an illustrated manual and as such it will no doubt be especially useful to beginners in bird study. The author has expressed excellent judgment in his choice of the 70 forms which are not figured. Thus, such well known birds as the Crow and Robin are not illustrated. Other kinds so eliminated include mostly rare or casual occurrences that are either strikingly individual, as the Whooping Crane and Spoonbill, or so similar in appearance as to render portrayal of the differences difficult or impossible. Some shearwaters and the *Empidonax* flycatchers, of which only the Western is illustrated, are examples of the latter category.

The author states in the preface that the Field Guide is not intended to replace Hoffmann's *Birds of the Pacific States* in the area (Washington, Oregon, and California) which both cover, but rather the latter is to be used as a companion piece to the former. In the other western states, the present guide should fill a much needed want. Mr. Peterson acknowledges Hoffmann's more thorough treatment of bird voices and habitats with the statement that such detailed consideration was impossible in a book the size of the present one.

The entire work is so well done and free from typographical and other errors that it would be uncharitable indeed to mention the remarkably few lapses that have come to the reviewer's attention. Perhaps the frequent omissions of a species' voice or notes, already mentioned, is a criticizable point; but here many of us can blame ourselves for not publishing what we know of this important subject, rather than the author. No one person can be expected to know the notes of every bird of a region, and for North America, Mr. Peterson probably knows as many as does any other person.

The excellence, usefulness, and modest cost of this book should be incentive for everyone interested in birds to own a copy. Certainly, this should apply to all bird students in the West, while to those in the East who know their birds well, the western guide will probably be more interesting than their local one.—James Moffitt.

BIRD ISLANDS DOWN EAST. By Helen Gere Cruickshank. With photographs by Allan D. Cruickshank. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1941: 6 x 8½ in., xii + 123 pp., 50 photos.

With exceptional charm Mrs. Cruickshank writes her first book—the adventures she has shared with her ornithologist husband among the sea bird colonies of